

Cultivating Space: Artifact and Agency in the Case of Theatre Before and Beyond Its Scenes

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Abstract

This essay addresses theatre space as a distinct actualization of a social site, namely that collective organization that is formulated in the context of performative activity. It seeks to further the understanding of its operations in constituting agency and the collective by way of examining physical space as an experiential field. It proposes an approach and institutes the methodological tools to enable analysis of architectural space at an empirical level and in terms of its unmediated nonmediating effects, accessing the productive embedded in the corporeality of space–body relationships. Theatre space is examined and ascertained as a site through which realities of the social are grasped, and immediate bodily experience in and through space is confirmed as an authentic path of acquiring practical knowledge. Bearing on the conceptualization of built architectural space, as well as on the material practices of constituting and inhabiting space, this study concretizes less-charted aspects of sociospatial reciprocities, the physical and the social self, and discloses the experiential lying with built space as a means of cultural continuity.

Keywords

social space, “lived” experience, space–body relationships, sociospatial reciprocity, theatre building type/architectural space

Introduction

This essay addresses theatre space as a distinct actualization of a social site, namely that particular kind of collective organization that is formulated in the context of performative activity. It seeks to further understanding of the operations of this site in constituting agency and the collective by positing physical space as an experiential field. It approaches built architectural space as an empirical entity and rearticulates it in its tangible nonrepresentational materiality. This allows exploring physical space in terms of possibilities embedded in its phenomenal presence (as distinct from the visual) and addressing its workings with respect to immediate experience (as distinct from perception, as well as from the purely phenomenological). It holds that inquiry at this level would disclose capacities of physical space beyond established architectural priorities and the interpretative schemes of meaning in perception and reveal an underexplored layer of corporeal correlations with space at base of alternative modalities of meaning formation. It would

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allow bringing into focus how built space assists those subtle ways of feeling and “knowing” that are acquired and actualized in precontemplative practice. It would thus help integrate concerns with the “lived” and the bodily experience into an account of the workings of this site as social space.

The choice of theatre as case for such a study is based on the fact that it presents the most formalized realization of this kind of collective organization as well as the original prototype for a range of analogous social spaces. However, it is also a contested example: The sociocultural significance of theatre, as well as the role of space in its mediation, is extensively examined in both theatre studies and the corresponding branch of architecture. Yet, although theorized through two distinct notions—the *theatrical work* and the *monument*—space is exclusively tied to the formulation of theatrical meanings. In both these fields, it is associated with and interpreted in terms of a range of representational functions—to which theatre experience stands in an essentially hermeneutic correlation.

Oriented toward that layer of experience—immediate and bodily—which evolves in, through, and with physical space, this current approach institutes an alternative notion—the *theatre mode of spatial organization*. It employs the term *mode* in its dual capacities to denote space at a potent mid-level, while also suggesting the ways or manner in which space works. This allows lifting off the layers of representation and arriving at a rendition of physical space prior to artistic and architectural particularizations. Theatre space emerges as a distinct entity—a resilient spatial form that is characterized by its inherent generic properties and principal effects. This altered perspective on physical space, then, allows complementing ongoing studies on theatrical (artistic/architectural) “functions” of space, with an analysis of its operations conducted at an empirical level.

Rearticulated in terms of *mode*, theatre space can be addressed, examined, and understood as an experiential field—a site through which realities of the social are grasped and sociocultural capacities are constituted and reformulated. It can be rendered tangible in view of possibilities emerging within concrete spatial circumstances and relations and thereby help access the productive embedded in the corporeality of space–body relationships—a stratum of phenomena that evolve in immediate “lived”¹ experience. Hence, this approach would confirm physical space as a resource or locus through which we exercise and embody our social abilities in the collective context of performance. It would allow intuiting the corporeal as a vital dimension of space, and as still another aspect in accounting for the readiness with which theatre would tend to be seen as an epitome of the social realm.

Theatre as Paradigm in Broad Perspective

Even a brief overview attests how far beyond its own realm the influences of theatre project—shaping notions, concepts, and conceptions at base of momentous inquiries into the broader context of social and cultural processes. Hence in Turner’s (1982) seminal work, ritual and theatre are traversed within deeper societal processes in terms of the “community”–“communitas” shift. A distinct field of research emerges around the conception of “performance,” where thinkers, as diverse as Schechner (1993) and Butler (1979), focus on social processes that range from organized cultural and political proceedings, through festivals, sports, and entertainment mass events, down to everyday attitudes of groups and individuals in terms of “enactment” or symbolic “representation” of identity. Theatre’s bearing on sociological research at the scale of agency finds expression in Goffman’s (1959, 1971) dramaturgical approach to social life, which employs the intricacies involved in the theatrical situation² itself to analyze strategic forms of interaction as constituents of micro-public order. Through concepts like “social actor,” “incorporation,” and “embodiment,” minute analysis of the constitutive potential in performative practice, is being integrated into more recent sociological perspectives addressing the corporeal as part of

the active agent.³ Deeper still into the subtle processes of emergence, the insights into what happens in the instance of performing confirm the increasingly blurred distinctions between performance and the everyday experience.⁴ Hence the concept of “the performative” is being employed by thinkers of diverse lineage⁵ who seek to relocate the ontological and epistemological within the bodily “precontemplative” processes of reconstitution.

In these perspectives, agency is discussed in reference with the complex significations embedded in social practice—that is, set within the broader sociocultural context. Among these manifold possible sources of signification, space remains an omnipresent, yet tacit notion, while terms like “spacing” or “architectures”⁶ in correlation with the processes of immediate experience, serve to indicate, rather than explicate, the spatial dimension.

Space and Its “Theatrical” Problems

In contrast, both theatre studies and the corresponding branch of architecture focus on space as a major medium whereby the sociocultural significance of theatre is being established. Yet in both discourses the prime concern is with understanding theatre experience and the complexities of the theatrical processes. Thereby, the role of space is firmly tied to the formulation of theatrical meanings—space comes to be interpreted in terms of its essentially representational functions.

In theatre studies, it is the conception of the *theatrical work*—a unique form of art and instance of cultural production, which grounds inquiry into the processes of production/presentation and mediation/perception. While this distinction is essential in explicating the operations of theatre as sociocultural context, it also leads to the differing terms in which the experience of the two groups involved in the theatrical situation are interpreted and diversifies the functions of space. One line of inquiry addresses the processes of production: involving the text, the technologies of performance, the staging strategies and conventions, performative techniques—all of which receive expression in the structures and codes of scenic art. In this, the performing body is seen in its practices—both animating craft and productive path to “incorporation” and “embodiment” where actual and presented realities merge.

However, on part of participants in the audience, corresponding interest in the immediate is lacking. Audience experience is approached primarily through the “mission” of the theatrical work, explaining the processes of meaning formation in various reception theories.⁷ This would indicate that account of the social and cultural import of theatre in these perspectives relates to that which is mediated: Social ideas are explored, experimented with, and questioned primarily via realities presented on stage. This mediated nature of the experience pertains also to emotive components—such as pleasure, pity, or fear, which are attached to the dramatic reversals of a plot and the experience of a protagonist. Theatre experience comes to rely on re-cognition and volitional imaginative modes of emotion and empathy. The fact that performance occurs in the form of a live event, too, is subsumed to the theatrical. Hence, constituted by “actors,” “audience,” and “actants,” a specifically “theatrical mode of community” is involved in “theatrical work”⁸—that is, the setting for this collective work, even as physical context attains the provisional character special to theatre.

Apart from “enacting” social customs⁹ in the practice of theatre going, account of social occurrences denotes “awareness” of others as a means of enhancing participation,¹⁰ as well as of maintaining the grasp over the artifices and realities of the theatrical. In more recent theorizations, direct correlations are interpreted in terms of more complex and affective phenomena, such as “embarrassment,” “collective laughter,” “corpsing,” or “fiasco,” and brought forth as socially significant aspects in the operations of theatre.¹¹ Yet all of these “lived” events and aspects ultimately depend on the theatrical work to begin. In keeping with these priorities, the multiple functions of space in constituting and mediating the temporary theatrical expressions for each specific performance are explicated by means of a whole host of terms (*fictional, scenic, theatrical, stage, dramatic, architectural*),¹² each blending actual and artistic components.

In studies of theatre architecture, the theatre building is seen to present the permanent manifestation of culturally defined ideas on the institution, on theatre, and on architecture. In order to identify how these functions are actualized in architectural form, discourse on theatre examines diverse examples throughout its historical evolution in correlation to the time-and-place-specific circumstances in which the monument is socially set. Analysis of the theatre monument evolves in view of two distinct areas of architectural attention. One relates to its exterior articulation—the distinctive architectural presence that establishes theatre as “social instrument” within its urban context: conveyed by location, volumetric composition, and correlation with other urban elements, the character and style of structural elements, and decorative detail. The other concerns the formulation of its “protected core,”¹³ where architectural space is to house the presentation of the performance, and, hence, enable diverse theatrical expressions. Spatial form is discussed in terms of format and geometry in so far as to identify the presentational potential of different configurations of stage and auditorium (such as arena, thrust stage or proscenium as set within horse shoe, elliptical polygonal, or square layout). The evaluation of architectural space, then, ranges from interpretations that focus on its (visual) appearance as cultural manifestation and a “text to be deciphered,”¹⁴ through to more analytical approaches that aim to establish how an authentically theatrical experience would be supported through architectural means.¹⁵

Apart from few perspectives that derive “shared” “family characteristics”¹⁶ (such as “density of space,” and “character and sense of place”), mainstream approaches on theatre architecture would tend to emphasize differences among examples as means of advancing the culture of theatre. The study of theatre in the terms of the architectural monument, which in its threefold expressivity (artistic, architectural, and cultural) presents a paramount actualization of “representational space,” has a further important repercussion. In foregrounding difference and evolution, it places the complex processes of its “social production” firmly within the practice of design. This comes to highlight the incorporation of components of dominant ideologies, which design inevitably involves, enhances,¹⁷ and precludes the possibility to seek account of sociospatial correspondences and constitutive process at more fundamental levels. This prevailing perspective would come to maintain the notion of built space as a means to elicit desired effects, represent and transmit intended messages—a vehicle to impress the culture of a society.

The liability of architectural space to be employed as a medium of projecting ideologies of power is brought forth with special acuteness in Madge’s (2007) discussion on theatre as a type. In this perspective, the type, identified by an original “armature” of five invariant constitutive elements—the shrine, the open space with altar and its enclosure, and the banked seating—is examined in critical proximity with respective ideologies throughout its historical evolution. Its constitutive elements and their relations are retraced through variants and modifications, demonstrating the radical transformation of the type: from an actualization of ritual and drama in Antiquity, through to the raise of spectacle and entertainment. Architectural form posited as the designed projection of sociopolitical intentions, pointing to “order” and the ocular mechanisms inherent to theatre, as prime features facilitating deliberated social impact. Although the systematic positioning of participants would show potential to convey, “diagrammatically,” “a sense of equality,” this spatial form would nevertheless be seen as an “apparatus”—a strategy in fixing requisite relations, facilitated by order and relentless observation. With major effects of the type defined in these terms, not only theatres but also other places based on this spatial scheme, would be seen as intentionally perfected for fostering attention and concentration, “discipline” and “control,” and hence—“behavior.”¹⁸ Or, as shown in the case of lecture theatres, the type would be seen as a spatial means of “social stratification” based on qualitative distinction of positions (center over periphery, axial over off-axial place), as well as fit for purporting conditions of “instruction,” and outright surveillance.¹⁹

It can be perceived how both these notions—the theatrical work and the architectural monument—offer account of the variety of theatre forms in the Western tradition, bound to

design, and in terms of evolving the culture of theatre production. The significance of space is seen in that it formulates, for each specific performance, the shared representational framework whereby theatrical meanings are produced and mediated. Experience, then, evolves in an essentially hermeneutic (interpretative) correlation with that which is presented on stage and the architectural that is given to perception.

Propositions and Potentials

Positing and examining theatre space in terms of “mode” bears analytical and explanatory potential in several respects. Deviating from established priorities on artistic and architectural expression, it alters the perspective on physical space, and opens up the possibility of its reconceptualization with respect to immediate experience. In this rendition, built space is construed as an equally shared, yet entirely corporeal framework—an experiential field that can be examined in its possible unmediated and nonmediating effects. The analysis of these effects—generic properties—conjoins various levels. It spans from the overall site—disclosing other essential ways in which the processes of performance depend on specified spatial effects, through to their spatial constructions and internal mechanisms—disclosing their affective potential at the minute level, with respect to the situated agent. Space comes forth in terms of qualities and conditions embedded in its material presence, and its operations—in terms of a layer of discreet processes engendered therein. By focusing on the constitutive capacities of space that evolve in terms of space-to-body relationships, this approach seeks to capture, analytically, the passage from space through sense to sensibility. It allows addressing and particularizing less-charted aspects of sociospatial reciprocities and the correlations of the physical and the social self, in terms of the intimate reverberations among situated body and the experiential charge of distinct spatial condition and circumstance.

Positing theatre space in the terms of mode allows pursuing a different path in understanding and explicating the persistence of this spatial form throughout its diverse implementations. It highlights its resilient features and generic properties and discloses resemblances, shared qualities, and continuities among different actualizations. This spatial form, then, can be construed as an enduring model that has been handed down and incorporated throughout its historical evolution. As such, it underlies not only all three major theatre forms but also a range of analogous social spaces—recognizable in built form and still legible in the spontaneous collective configurations of everyday life. Furthermore, it allows retracing this spatial form in its social emergence, seeking explication of the persistent reproduction of this spatial form not in design, but rather in its generic properties and effects—that is, in terms of the cultural continuities of collective sociospatial practices through which it has come forth, originally. Constituted for and through distinct patterns of collective activity, this spatial form can be acknowledged as an artifact proper—a product of material culture. As such, it would present a physical framework that has come to embed and solidify few but fundamental principles pertinent to the collective. Analyzed as “lived” space in its most formalized actualization—theatre space, it allows reconstructing a stratum of discreet processes through which such principles might be internalized. Theatre as physical space comes forth as an experiential field with capacities to cultivate sensibilities pertinent to the constitution of the self and the collective, enabling social togetherness.

The “Theatre Mode” as an Approach to Architectural Space

The approach to architectural space in terms of “mode” facilitates a shift away from emphasis on space-as-object-of-study-itself, toward an analysis of the ways in which space and bodies correlate. Hence, while addressing many of the components and elements conventional to the study of architecture, such as enclosure, stage, and auditorium in various configurations, spatial form in

sectional and volumetric detail, these are rearticulated so as to disclose their effects and operations. Analysis of space concerns the capacities of the site with respect to the performance—such as to present, configure, or focus, through to its aptitudes with respect to the body—such as to trigger (awareness), suggest (relations), or incite (affect). It entails linking up spatial effects at various levels by focusing on the innate potentialities these bear and would be apt to be sensed by the situated body.

As spatial form, the theatre mode corresponds to its appointed function. It is structured by and coheres with the performance as a structured event: involving the processes of production, presentation, and encounter with the theatrical work. Hence, the overall constitution of the spatial entity is characterized by and reproduces this principal structure: It simultaneously enables these functions, establishes the performance as a distinct occurrence, and configures the collective. Such integral correspondence would suggest that these principal processes would depend on specified spatial effects materialized within spatial form.

Three concepts—*isolation*, *exposure*, and *collective containment*—are instituted as analytical tools to particularize such effects. Construed as generic to the site,²⁰ these are employed in their capacity to denote spatial terms that are at the same time experiential conditions. Each of these comes forth as a actualization of a set of specific circumstances and mechanisms that support the unfolding of the performance as distinct occurrence. As spatial terms impressed upon theatre space, they economically redescribe the principal architectural elements and components in keeping with the fundamental functions of the site: to define and protect, to facilitate presentation and perception of an act, and to accommodate and organize. Yet when considered as conditions, they allow construing of the generation, within physical space, of possibilities for experience. By linking up physical circumstance and experiential content, they begin to render these conditions in terms of particular experiential charge—as forms of experience.

Methodologically, this implies extending architectural analysis into properties and operations of space, with a speculative inquiry into the phenomenal possibilities embedded therein. Equipped with the specificity of spatial circumstance, this approach begins to disclose space-to-body reciprocities as these evolve. It comes to addresses experiential ingredients that cannot be directly observed or evidenced, but only reconstructed, circumstantially, arriving at a range of discreet processes and practices that actualize at the precontemplative level. Built architectural space comes forth as an empirical experiential field—a qualified physical framework, open to appropriation. It can be examined, disclosing the affective, ethical, and cognitive components of social import it might bear.

A Socially Constituted Artifact

Theatre's legible spatial form and its persistent re-production in subsequent modifications is more fully understood when set within its origins in sociospatial practices: It comes about in the process of conjoining two vital social traditions. As established in historical evidence, the first permanent theatre sites are formed in blending the setting of gathering in the oral tradition, with that which enables the presentation of religious ritual to public observation.²¹ This allows acknowledging the spatial form as having evolved not only for a particular social function but also through sociospatial practices. It presents a thoroughly physical and entirely social material product, which has been actualized, tested, and refined in collective endeavor—a great artifact proper.

Positing theatre in terms of mode allows perceiving the compelling resemblance that it bears—both as structured space for social activity and as organized collective event—to other cultural entities, such as festivals, social occasions, and larger physical structures. This opens up the possibility to pursue, by analogy, the inquiry into theatre space in keeping with other artifacts

that are larger structures. Hence, for instance, the cases of churches and marae²² are studied in spatial detail, and, following Bourdieu's (1977, 1997) foundational work, are established as entities relevant to the understanding of spatial references in their sociocultural role.

Such analogy holds methodological potential in that it draws on insights from sociological and anthropological perspectives. Thereby, the architectural analysis of built space comes to address and emphasize capacities of space in constituting and expressing the social in view of more "embodied" notions of sociospatial reciprocities and material practices. The theatre mode comes forth as a "structured space" for collective activity and "materialization of social relations," and thus as a site where the "grounds for agency are formed and transformed." As such, it would help identify those principal features of tangible material form "in and through" which a set of fundamental ideas on collective organization, notions of the nature of social relations and the public, hence values integral to these are "conceptualized," put to practice, and "mediated." However, although relying on these propositions for the understanding of the possible role of space, this current approach pursues a different, complementary path of inquiry into the correlations with space. It deviates from both the representational in conventional perspectives on architecture and from the referential role of "spatial clues" associated with material elements in space (such as "post" and "pillar") in their intricate signifying functions. Rather, it seeks to render aspects of sociospatial reciprocities in the correspondence spatial form to sociospatial practices, as well as disclose its very operations as "lived" space in terms of possible unmediated effects.

One important distinction of the theatre-artifact from a conventional communal site can be identified in view of the scale and nature of its influence. A conventional "communal site" would be seen to express the shared values and "collective consciousness" of a formulated group in a "specified social field."²³ Theatre, in contrast, emerges as an artifact of special status: it materializes a social site that works as a unifying entity at the scale of the city. It is formed as a place that incorporates and enables the religious Dionysian cults, the secular drama, festivals, and other public occasions and events. Hence, it occupies the intersection between different realms of the tripartite polis: the sacred (acropolis), the mundane (agora), and the collective (theatre).²⁴ In addition to symbolical aspects, this confluence is embedded in the structured form of physical space: this spatial modality reproduces the properties and features, which these diverse collective events share. It comes forth as experiential field with capacity to actualize and promote the constitution of practices, values, and understanding that pertain to the *communal per se*.

Considered within the very processes of its formation, the physical constitution of this spatial entity can be accounted for in terms of spatial practices, down to the minute level of the body. Hence, what gradually solidifies within this spatial form entails and expresses the almost spontaneous efficacy of alignment, whereby the essential directionality and specificities of bodies at work in this pattern of collective activity are being acknowledged and actualized. These principles of structuring and order materialize in few but powerful physical features: the regular, even uniform, compact organization, and the orientation of social bodies around and toward a distinct core. While these first actualizations would vary as to the extent of their "constructedness" (such as using naturally curved slopes or shaping banked seating rows), they already incorporate the principal qualities of this spatial form. It is founded within its larger surrounds by way of differentiation (such as express in the density of occupied space) and exclusion (bodies averting toward an inside)—actualizing the condition of isolation in its aptitude to define and delimit. It assumes its characteristic, frequently concentric structure and arrangement around its core—relying on exposure in its aptitude to present and relate. Thereby established also as a place of destination, this spatial configuration comes to express gravitational power: It invites growth and accretion without losing its principal formal and structural character—that is, it actualizes the aptitude of collective containment to assimilate, accommodate, and organize. What could be derived by analysis of the concrete spatial circumstances of the theatre mode, then, would concern certain essential preconditions, that enable the coexistence and collaboration of members of

diverse groups, as conditions that are relevant to the understanding of principles in the cultural tradition of cross-communal togetherness.

From Space to Sense: The Theatre Mode as Experiential Field

Theatre presents one of the most distinct spatial formations embedding the collective organizations of social practice. It instates a spatial form of utterly legible and powerful identity and proposes straightforward resources of order and identification. Its overall spatial constitution is governed by the prime principle of centering, whereby it corresponds to and enables to collective activities in the context of performance. This principle consolidates spatial elements and components and crystallizes into a figure easily recognized and reproduced. However, when examined within, in terms of its operations with respect to the situated body, it comes forth as a deeply ambiguous and intense experiential field, charged with controversial forces and impulses. Each of the generic conditions—isolation, exposure, and collective containment, partakes in the constitution of its overall effects, diversifying their experiential bearing. Each of these conditions emerges to phenomenal presence: It takes form by way of composing and re-composing the same spatial features. Yet within each condition, these spatial features attain tangibility as circumstances and effects with different experiential bearing and mobilize specific internal mechanisms. It is through the intricacies of the corroboration of these conditions whereby physical space vitalizes the possibility of becoming drawn into the irretrievable modality of experience: it presents a qualified matter which, reverberating with the body, invites exploration, and entails active appropriation. Surrounding and affective, it proposes engagement, suggests relations, evokes dispositions, induces feelings, and summons latent abilities. It is in terms of such diverse experiential possibilities that the situated agent would come to grasp aspects of the sociospatial reality—and acquire insight into self and into membership in the collective. Analysis of this field will seek to disclose those workings of space that concern the formulation of the sense of self, of belonging and participation, of awareness over the complexities in sharing and equality, the “knowing” of vulnerability—that is, the intuition of few but essential principles and properties inherent to this form of social assembly.

Isolation

In discourse on theatre space, *isolation* is taken as spatial term that confers the requisite separation of the performance from the flow of life and marks its distinction from an outside. However, in this analysis, it exceeds its function as margin, and is brought forth in its capacities to institute an essential and experientially consequential condition for all participants involved, legible among groups, as well as among individuals. As a concept, isolation describes the condition of being set apart, and distinct from others, which, in reference to its etymological roots (isle as a piece of land within sea), suggests a particular way of occupying space—within the perception of a special correlation to something else. It becomes effective only within a more extensive context, when emphasized by a threshold. It materializes the circumstance of being surrounded and detached—a condition instigating a sense of centering.

In built space, the sense of disconnecting from an outside is rendered tangible not only in the enclosure that defines and delimits the field of activity as a distinct occurrence. This sense of detachment is enhanced in the special treatment of the transitions and thresholds, marking the process of passing toward the core, which characterizes the experience of all participants involved. For both groups, this passage and segregation is augmented by the crossing of complex boundaries, whereby the core of space—the stage or auditorium respectively—assumes the status of a destination, a center. Enhanced by orientation—another means in constituting this condition, isolation begins to articulate the motion toward the center, mobilizing the dynamic impetus

of focusing. These spatial constructions help disclose how the site attains the quality of place of destination: stable in its reliance on a single spatial mechanism, sedimentary in its introvert nature, and protected. Hence, in spite of the subtle means of segregation at the micro-level, allotting specific seats and dispersing individual participants, the qualities and mechanisms of isolation contribute to the feeling of embeddedness, rootedness, as well as belonging to an entity that is distinct.

In the context of the assembly, the deeper internal mechanisms of this condition—that is that being held in space and short of a relation, would trigger awareness of one's situation and self as dependent on the apprehension of others. Hence, the experience of this condition invokes a centering, within, and absorption into the immediate instant. In the terms of the corporeal conditions of isolation, this state is akin to suspense: It comes forth as a possibility of becoming aware over being fixed in space as well as self-absorbed—a state of accumulation of energies and intensity and a fertile precondition of passage into activated modes of being. In generating such activation, isolation can be construed as a condition that would become conducive of awareness over further aspects of membership, where acceptance and involvement with the roles presupposed by the site (both the activity and the assembly) contain the grains of bond relationships.

Exposure

In conventional use, *exposure* is employed as a spatial term firmly attached to the situation of the performer, to the act of presenting something to an audience, and, by extension—to the condition of the stage with respect to the auditorium. It is taken to account for visibility and openness—that is, acknowledged insofar as it establishes the performance-as-presentation in its contingent circumstances and relations. Its experiential effects, then, have come to be attributed exclusively to the performer, who is being presented, exhibited, displayed—visually accessible, and hence vulnerable.²⁵

For this current analysis, in contrast, exposure is construed as a prolific and intensely affective condition that characterizes the entire site, operates through various mechanisms, and exerts its deeply disturbing charges over all participants involved. Building up on its theorization in reference with structures of fear,²⁶ the discussion here seeks to disclose how this condition marks the sense of self, the notions of sharing, equality, and togetherness as well as of intuitions as to the nature of this form of assembly.

The modality of occupying space indicated by the concept goes way beyond visibility, to suggest the acute perception of the correlation to something else that is intertwined with uncertainty and even risk. Its more intricate implications (*ex-*, *pose*) translate into physical terms as dynamic impulses, paired with compulsion, which uphold both stasis and motion: The presenting of one to another is actualized as a putting forth, while being held in place—arrested. It is, then, a physical condition that is sensed as essentially ambivalent and labile. Yet as the setting itself holds no direction, the condition comes forth as decisively reciprocal—it collapses distinctions between observer and observed, intruder and intruding. It subjects, the parties in that relation to the possibility of perpetual oscillation between these two experientially inverse conditions—it conflates sense with apprehension.

With respect to the overall site, the spatial constructions of exposure, too, utilize the main principle of focusing. Yet in the context of exposure, this principle builds up to rather different effects: it imparts the requisite relations with dynamic impetus, renders active, and compels to engagement. The reciprocal nature of this condition is legible even in the simplest straight row arrangement, which ensures that the auditorium is equally displayed and the relation is activated by confronting participants directly. In the context of these mechanisms, exposure is sensed, it is viscerally felt, attaining even tactile effects in its spatial constructions. Its destabilizing spatial mechanisms are articulate not only in the treatment of the stage putting it forth as a dynamic

pole—by means of elevating and impressing the act into space or extending the thrust stage, but are also augmented in the auditorium space—such as in the steep inclination of the auditorium or the forward protrusion of tiers and balconies. Yet the uncertainties and liabilities embedded in space become still more tangible in configurations—such as the transverse, U-shape, or the arena arrangement, where accustomed relations are diversified or reversed. These forms turn out rather disconcerting, blurring conventional distinctions by placing agents as background to stage and part of the action and diversifying the contingent correlations.²⁷

Rooted in bodily sense, and coupled with the ambivalence within and the perpetual oscillation it insinuates, exposure vitalizes an acute awareness of one's liabilities. It also incites and enables a realization of others captured in the same unsettled state. It comes forth as a path in acquiring "bodily" knowledge on vulnerability as well as in intuiting vulnerability as a profound dimension of membership in this collective form the impetus of affect, this condition would nurture the sense of sharing and alter notions of equality—it grounds the possibility of grasping a different principle of power—such as that of generosity.²⁸ In the extending—contracting dynamics of this spatial form, this principle would be suggested as an outward force to acknowledge the other: Easing the paths of compassion and engendering what can be conceived as a "bodily" practice of empathy.

Collective Containment

Collective containment depicts the mode in its capacities to establish the performance site as a shared space—as it enables the various processes whereby engagement with the constitution of collectivity evolves. In denoting the site, collective containment conjures two mutually enhancing spatial conditions. The term *collective* accounts for effects of space that facilitate assembling (as to unite) and reception (as accommodation of a variety of agents and components). Containment relates to those spatial effects that emphasize its capacity to hold these together by way of enclosing and including, implicating togetherness in the processes by which the common is kindled. The more personal underpinnings of term, too, connote some subtle processes of regaining control (of oneself, of one's wits) and summoning up (one's faculties or powers).

In its spatial constructions, collective containment incorporates and amalgamates the mechanisms of exposure and isolation so as to emphasize the whole: it accentuates admission and inclusiveness. Composite by nature, the articulation of the site as an entity is express in the principles of order, establishing its two constituents—stage and auditorium—as mutually complementary parts that form a larger whole while also preserving their respective definition. Their spatial correlations are constructed in tight coordination, ranging from adjacency of stage and auditorium (end stage /proscenium formats) through to interlocking or total inclusion (thrust stage, arena). Hence the identity of the mode attains the quality of balance, and spatial continuity, while unity is most express in the monolithic spaces of amphitheatre configurations reminiscent of the stern prototypes of Antiquity.

In the spatial constructions of collective containment, the major mechanism of focusing (core as destination in isolation; core as presentation in exposure) is reasserted as the prevailing principle, which generates the extending—contracting dynamics of the site. It exerts the gravitational force of this spatial form, which, although delimited, allows and invites growth without losing its character as structured space. The other major quality of this spatial form—order—is enhanced by the strict geometrical formatting of the spatial components and marks its compulsory traits. Yet, as its origins in social practice confirm, this order actually inherently coheres with the nature of both the body and the assembly. It, therefore, is bound to be felt, acknowledged, and embodied as a constructive necessity: as indispensable in facilitating the operation of the collective site as it is in positing of agency as observance. These effects not only assist the processes of identification with, and belonging to a place that is distinct, but also formalize accommodation within, and together, enhancing awareness of the collective nature of the site.

As a condition, collective containment includes individual members in ways that permeate their status as solitary centers procured by isolation (as dispersal) and still upheld by exposure (as their viable correlation). It suspends their self-centering effects, orients toward openness and sharing, yet also maintains a two-folded awareness: that of being distinct (individuality) and that of being part of something larger (assembly), enabling engagement with the roles and relations proposed by the site. It mobilizes various mechanisms and levels through which the encounter with and the constitution of the collective occur. The sense of sharing evolves both in terms of (indirect) sharing—in common attention over the presented work and as the awareness of the immediacy of simultaneous presence in space and occasion (directs sharing). Triggered in such strictly corporeal ways, then, aspects of association and kinship can develop, on which conceiving of collectivity beyond sum and accretion becomes possible. At the site, this involves a variety of processes, each proposing a different dimension pertinent to this form of experience. In terms of venture, a “special form of collective questioning”²⁹ is instituted and accomplished, hinting at the sociopolitical potentials of this spatial form. In terms of social conduct, it sustains the enactment of formal and ceremonial motifs, whereby social relations as conventions and contracts are reaffirmed. Yet it also renders legible some less overt capacities of the site—pointing to the processes of observance of organized communal practice and ritual that bear on the sense of solidarity, while at the same time constraining conduct and attitude.³⁰ The immediately experiential that this analysis addresses, then, presents a narrow corporeal section of analogous and productive processes—those that are immediately correlated with the properties of the site, evolve in the context of performance, and belong to the principles and practices of cross-communal togetherness.

Discussion

This study has sought to establish that inquiry into physical space with respect to immediate experience can disclose novel aspects pertinent to the understanding of the materiality of space, the situated body, and their experiential correlations, along with the affective, cognitive, and ethical embedded therein. It has focused on the case of theatre, holding that its social and cultural import is not confined to representation (the monument as expression of aesthetic ideas through physical appearance in detail and style), and/or other forms of signification (spatial clues as expression and reference of a social field) of space, but is also deeply embedded in operations of space as an experiential field. It has approached theatre space as a distinct actualization of a social site and instituted conceptual and methodological tools for an analysis of space at an empirical level and in terms of its unmediated nonmediating effects, thereby accessing the productive embedded in the corporeality of space–body relationships.

Positing theatre space at the mid-level of “mode of spatial organization” has enabled linking this spatial form with its social constitution and establishing it as a model preceding design handed down and incorporated in diverse modifications throughout its historical evolution. As such, it can be recognized not only within all three major theatre forms in the Western tradition (the proscenium, the thrust stage, and the arena/theatre in the round), but it can also be perceived as an underlying spatial logic, which governs the formulation of analogous social sites with diverse appointed functions ranging from lecture rooms, assembly halls, places of worship, or courtrooms, through to spaces for entertainment, and open-air urban forms. The proposed approach, then, bears relevance to all these spaces for collective activities and can be employed as part of their analysis. These homologies also point beyond schematic resemblance and toward an altered conception of “mode” as a “spatial type”—characterized by shared physical and social qualities.

Certain findings in view of the concepts facilitating this analysis would be relevant to the broader context of everyday experience. While the conditions in question have been rendered explicit by way of their constructions in formalized space, they actually do depict rather generic

experiential forms. It can be construed that they would also issue as circumstances to be encountered in daily life. They would be legible in all the instances and occasions that generate collective activity—meetings, gatherings around street performances, and other incidences, where this spatial mode is spontaneously reproduced. Yet as fleeting and inarticulate they may be, the conditions of isolation and exposure come forth as integral to the experience of social space, and can still be apprehended as possible constituents of analogous experiential ingredients.

By tracing the passage from space to sense to sensibility, this analysis ascertains theatre-as-physical-space as a potent experiential field and a site through which realities of the social are grasped and experience in and through space—as an authentic path of acquisition of practical knowledge. This bears on discourse on theatre in that it complements inquiry into the artistic functions of space in establishing the social and cultural significance of theatre by rendering one that coheres with, yet evolves relatively autonomous from theatrical production: to maintain and constitute sensibilities vital to the collective at the level of corporeal immediate experience. It also bears on the discourse on architecture, confirming that built physical space, even that of this most formalized monument—theatre—is actually, and inevitably, “open” to productive appropriation when construed at the level of the body.

Within its margins, this study extends on spatial practices and sociospatial reciprocity. These concern aspects that can be rendered explicit by examining concrete circumstances and specified effects of architectural space—aspects that are less-explored or explicated elsewhere, as are also certain ingredients of the dialectic relationships between the physical and the social self. Theatre has provided a special case to render such reciprocities explicit—as they issue in the material practices of the very constitution of this spatial form. This not only enables an alternative explanation of its enduring effects but also points to physical space as a means of cultural continuity. In turn, its analysis as spatial form allows retracing few but essential principles pertinent to the very foundations of sociospatial organization within the materiality of the practices of inhabitation. It offers opportunity to infer and reconstruct the processes through which such principles might be intuited, concepts and values grasped, reformulated, and incorporated. Among these, it is perhaps the bodily knowledge on vulnerability and the embodied practice of empathy that emerge as particularly constructive. As Allan (1993) asserts, the practice of empathy with its impetus for understanding does present the sole practice to enrich our very repertoire of practices. The theatre site, then, can be understood in its capacities to vitalize essential preconditions for the coexistence and collaboration of members of diverse groups and cultivate sensibilities that nourish the operations of the social. As but one particularization of how our “thrown-togetherness” might actualize in the context of theatre, this study confirms built space as still another, corporeal framework through which we exercise cognitive, creative, and emotive abilities, and ultimately rethink and embody selfhood.

Author's Note

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Notes

1. The shift toward the “lived” in sociological and philosophical thought takes the form of “lived space” in sociospatial discourse. For its theorization in terms of processes of appropriation, refer to Lefebvre (1991, pp. 1-68). For a compelling vocalization of this shift in recent spatial theory, refer to Massey (2005, pp. 1-36), who argues for a conceptualization of space as “open,” “porous,” and “relational”—embedded in material practices and hence constituted and constitutive of agency.
2. The reference here is to the famous and laconic depiction of the theatrical situation, which entails “an empty space,” someone who performs an activity therein, while “someone else is watching” voiced by Brook (1990, p. 11).
3. A broad range of such approaches is discussed by Shilling (1993), and Williams and Bendelow (1998), works that mark the affective turn in the field, pursuing the reconstitution of the body’s relevance to sociological thought.
4. Dewsbury (2000) in his essay “Performativity and the event” (pp. 473-496) puts forth their resemblances in that both are corporeal and actual, open to scrutiny in the presence of others, and prone to chance and the unpredictable.
5. On diverse conceptualizations of “the performative,” see *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (Vol. 16, 1998 and Vol. 18, 2000), where a range of perspectives on body/subject/agency are organized around this concept.
6. Terms in quotations relate the terminology employed by Dewsbury (2000, pp. 473-496).
7. On a seminal research on reception theories, refer to Bennett (1990).
8. Barr (1998, pp. 1-34).
9. Such aspects of social custom are extensively documented by McAuley (1999).
10. Forsyth (1987) notes this in evaluating the experience of architectural space by audiences.
11. Ridout (2006).
12. Refer, for instance, the taxonomy of spaces as relayed in McAuley (1999).
13. Breton (1989, pp. 4-14).
14. On a semiotic approach to theatre architecture, refer to Carlson (1989).
15. For a range of such studies, refer to Breton (1989), Mackintosh (1993), and Wiles (2003).
16. See Mackintosh (1993) for a detailed discussion of such shared features.
17. In Lefebvre’s (1991) tripartite theoretical framework, the social production of space is explicated in terms of “representational” space (monument)—the realm of materialized expression of social relations of production, “representations” of space (ideas, drawings/images)—the realm of ideology, and “lived space” as the realm of appropriation of these by the social subject. Set within the second category “representations” of space, design facilitates its correlation and mediation with “representational” space. On further detail, refer to Lefebvre (1991, pp. 1-68).
18. Terms in quotations in this paragraph refer to Madge (2007, pp. 1-35).
19. See Markus (1993, pp. 95-157, 169-240).
20. For a discussion of these concepts as generic properties of the site, see Öztürk (2006).
21. See Sienkewicz (1991).
22. The terms in quotations in this section, which are not referenced otherwise, are derived from Sissons (2007, pp. 47-62).
23. See Sissons (2007).
24. See Sienkewicz (1991).
25. For stage fright, refer to Aaron (1986) and Ridout (2006).
26. See Öztürk (2010).
27. Purcell (2005) discusses the reliance on such disturbing effects in performing strategies.
28. Examining the nature of relations established in dialogue, Jenkins (2002) juxtaposes tolerance with vulnerability, asserting the latter in its potential to actualize openness to transformation through receptivity and permeability.
29. Breton (1989, p. 4).
30. Refer, for instance, to Mauss (2002), who theorizes the social and socializing power of ritual as practice and act in the formation of collectivity.

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